

Moving Together: Getting Around A-Town



Traffic Laws that You May Have Forgotten

by Ed Starr, Elisabeth Carr-Jones and Scott Smith

We are all forgetful now and then about the traffic laws we know, but there are also ones that we don't encounter often and forget, or might have never known.

Of course, we all know that speeding can lead to a ticket. But what are the *speed limits* in town? They are posted in some places but not everywhere. The fundamental law is "No person operating a motor vehicle on any way shall run it at a rate of speed greater than is reasonable and proper, having regard to traffic and the use of the way and the safety of the public." If posted, you know the number. If not posted, since most of Arlington is "thickly settled," the "reasonable and proper" speed is 30 mph. Depending on certain conditions (such as weather) the "reasonable and proper" speed may be much slower than 30 mph.

Have you tried to cross an intersection with a green light, but other operators have blocked the intersection after their light turned red? Infuriating, isn't it? It might make you feel better to know that those operators are breaking the law. The law states that you may not enter an intersection unless there is enough space for you to travel through and clear the intersection (and specifically states that having a green light is not a defense for violating this law). It's posted at some intersections (Lake and Brooks, for example) but is the law everywhere! Please be thoughtful of your fellow drivers.

Entering traffic from a driveway, parking lot or alley can create many conflicts with motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Operators exiting these areas should always stop before crossing any sidewalk to ensure it is clear of pedestrians. They should also stop and yield the right of way to oncoming traffic before entering the roadway.

We have many "No Turn on Red" signs at our signalized intersections. Often times pedestrians have a designated walk signal and the right of way and this increases their safety. In other cases, opposing traffic may have a left turn green arrow (like Summer and Mill), leading to a conflict. If not posted, it is legal to make a right on rd after coming to a complete stop and yielding to other drivers and pedestrians who have the right of way.

We are sure that you all know that you **MUST** yield to a pedestrian in a *crosswalk* on your side of the road. If a pedestrian is on the opposite side, you must stop when they are within ten feet of the center of the road. You should always drive more slowly when approaching a crosswalk and be very alert for pedestrians. Even at 25 mph, the average vehicle will travel approximately 55 feet before your foot even hits the brake. When on a multi-lane

road, you should be extra vigilant around cars stopped at intersections without their turn signals activated or stopped in the middle of the block. There may be a pedestrian in a crosswalk outside of your direct view. This happens frequently in front of Town Hall or near the library. Check carefully before passing that stopped car. The fine for not stopping for a pedestrian in a crosswalk or passing a car stopped for such a pedestrian is a stiff \$200.

For operators of motor vehicles, there's the question of where you can park after having driven so responsibly. Legal spots exist all along Mass Ave and on our other streets, but there are restrictions based on both state laws and town bylaws. One state regulation prohibits parking within 20 feet of an intersection. This space is allowed so a driver trying to get onto or across a street can see the oncoming traffic without pulling into the intersection. Others include no parking within 10 feet of a hydrant (for obvious reasons), over 12 inches from a curb, on a marked crosswalk, or on any part of the curb or sidewalk. A bylaw present in Arlington also prohibits parking within 3 feet of a driveway, or across the street from any driveway in a way that obstructs access to and from that driveway (which is important on some of our narrow streets).

These rules and others that cannot be listed due to space limitations apply to operators all vehicles (including cyclists) and can lead to potential fines if violated. For more information or even a good refresher, you can always reread the Massachusetts Driver's Manual online at www.mass.gov/rmv/dmanual/index.htm.

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